

# Buddy Guy & Junior Wells Play The Blues

STEREO  
SD 33-364





1. A MAN OF MANY WORDS
2. MY BABY SHE LEFT ME  
(SHE LEFT ME A MULE TO RIDE)
3. a. COME ON IN THIS HOUSE  
b. HAVE MERCY BABY
4. T-BONE SHUFFLE
5. A POOR MAN'S PLEA
6. MESSIN' WITH THE KID
7. THIS OLD FOOL
8. I DON'T KNOW
9. BAD BAD WHISKEY
10. HONEYDRIPPER

AAD

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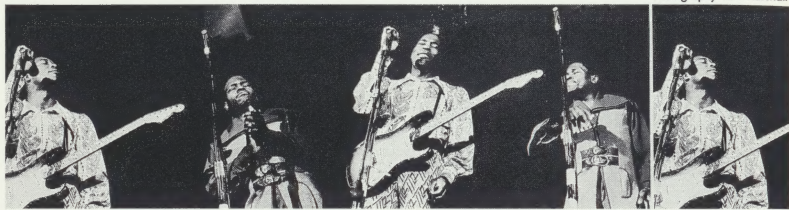
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Photography: Jim Marshall



Performed with conviction, recorded with restraint and buoyed by serendipitous circumstance, *Buddy Guy & Junior Wells Play The Blues* survived a tortuous history encompassing four producers, two different studios, and temporary exile in Atlantic's vaults before its redemption as a paradigm of modern blues at its finest.

Like many albums in the early '70s, the record started as a whim. Of course, as *Eric Clapton's* whim, it carried enough weight to get almost any recording off the ground. Having just wrapped the immortal *Layla* sessions with Derek & The Dominoes at Miami's Criteria Studios, Clapton was looking for something worthwhile to do while record company experts on both sides of the Atlantic debated final mixes for the epic title track.

Eric worshipped at the altar of the blues throughout his life and felt a special kinship with Buddy Guy, another exceptional singer-guitarist

whose incendiary style had vaulted him to the forefront of the modern Chicago school. Here was the ideal opportunity to record a forthright collection of blues standards showcasing Guy and his gifted cohort on harmonica and vocals, Junior Wells.

Talk about your perfect match. Through The Yardbirds, Cream or Blind Faith, Clapton invariably cast off the mantle of rock supernova in favor of music that satisfied his deep-rooted traditionalist urges. Buddy and Junior, modern blues firebrands who pushed hard on the heels of Muddy Waters and Howlin' Wolf into the Windy City, always stayed true to the traditional Delta styles that had shaped their musical upbringing in the South.

Born in Lettsworth, Louisiana and weaned on the steamy Bayou blues circuit, Guy combined the heady brew of Lightnin' Hopkins, T-Bone Walker, B.B. King, Eddie "Guitar Slim" Jones and others into a high-voltage style consisting of equal parts keening vocals and savage guitar played at

spectacular (for those days) volume levels.

Migrating north in the late '50s, Buddy fanned the flames of a growing reputation for outrageous showmanship on the competitive Chicago club circuit before signing with Chess Records, where he cut the heart-stopping "First Time I Met The Blues." This incandescent single was a harbinger of the primal scream style that would tear audiences' heads off in the years to come. It is integral to *The Very Best Of Buddy Guy* collection on Rhino.

Leonard Chess was reluctant to let him really cut loose on vinyl with his displays of guitar and vocal pyromania, so Buddy moved on to Vanguard and Blue Thumb in the '60s. In 1966, he formed a historic partnership with Junior Wells, and these popular "Ambassadors of the Blues" worked steadily on the college and festival circuit, eventually touring Europe, Africa, Australia and Japan.

Buddy had to rely on British and French record labels to keep the flame alive during the next two decades. But the '90s have witnessed his return to center stage, thanks to a stream of tributes from hard-core fans like Clapton, Jeff Beck, Mark Knopfler, and the late, lamented Stevie Ray Vaughan. In fact, Beck and Knopfler sit in on Guy's most recent disc, *Damn Right I've Got The Blues*, a vigorous return to the music that put him on the map in the first place. His club, *Buddy Guy's Legends*, is a regular stop for jam-hungry musicians passing through Chicago.

Amos "Junior" Wells, a Memphis native with a harmonica style deep-fried in the pioneering blues of both Sonny Boy Williams, burned his way onto the Chicago scene in 1946. He kicked around for a few years, polishing his deep, throaty harp playing and strutting vocals. Wells eventually took Little Walter's place in the Muddy Waters Band. He went on to cut a number of stark, chilling LPs under his own name and with Guy, most notably gems like *Hoodoo Man Blues* on the Delmark label.

With little time to spare, Clapton acted on his impulse and invited Buddy and Junior down to Miami in October of 1970. The plan was to capture spontaneous performances of classics that had become closely identified with the two men over the years. Rehearsals and pre-production were nonexistent. The sessions lasted only a few days; most of the tracks were recorded in one take with a minimum of overdubs and just a pinch of natural echo to recreate the urgent sound of early Chess records.

The sympathetic cast of backing musicians was anchored by Chicago stalwarts A.C. Reed on tenor sax, Leroy Stewart on bass, and Roosevelt Shaw on drums. Eric sat in discreetly on rhythm and bottleneck guitar, most notably on a sublime acoustic/electric duet with Buddy on the guitarist's mournful plaint to demon booze, "**Bad Bad Whiskey.**" The Dixie Flyers' Mike Utley and Dr. John handled piano and organ with flair and insight, the good Dr. rolling the ivories with extra

gumbo on "T-Bone Shuffle," "Messin' With The Kid" and the powerful opener, "Man Of Many Words." Dominoes drummer Jim Gordon and bassist Carl Radle dropped in to punch up some rhythm tracks on the latter.

Eric was also lucky to have two ringers in the control room: Tom Dowd, the astute Atlantic veteran who had already produced countless history-makers (up to and including *Layla*), and Ahmet Ertegun, the company's founder and chairman whose perceptive songwriting and production skills pretty much defined the golden era of Atlantic R&B.

Unfortunately, the headlong pace of recording took its toll. Only eight tracks from the Criteria session, all included here, were deemed worthy of release, at least two shy of an album. The tapes languished in the vaults until Michael Cuscuna, a young Atlantic staff producer, convinced the company to salvage the project by recording two additional tunes at Boston's Intermedia Studios with the J. Geils Band, a young blues combo with plenty of roots-savvy musicianship and high octane energy.

They mesh seamlessly with Buddy (Junior was unable to attend) on two of this collection's standouts. "This Old Fool," a spine-tingler, builds in dramatic intensity to a solo guitar epiphany near the end of the track. "Honeydripper" is a wry, shuffling instrumental, sparked by the counterpoint of Guy's manic solos forcing the lazy rhythm while Seth Justman's piano and Buddy's

guitar work the melody line for all it's worth.

The Miami selections kick off with the most modern-sounding effort on an album reeking with traditionalism, "A Man Of Many Words." A true Buddy Guy original, propelled by the sinuous funk of Gordon, Radle and Dr. John, it gets right to the essence of his attitude with lyrics like, "I know I rap long, and I know I rap strong/ Come on mama let me turn you on."\* The guitar fulminations threaten to overhaul the track with every solo break.

From there, we segue to a soulful medley by Junior Wells. Sonny Boy Williamson's "My Baby She Left Me (She Left Me A Mule To Ride)," a Wells staple, motors along as the guitar and piano trade off the growling vocals and shrieking harp that make Junior so special. Two originals, "Come On In This House" and "Have Mercy Baby," combine in a bluesy dirge marked by dramatic breaks, smooth shifts in tempo, and fervent call-and-response action between Buddy's guitar and Junior's impassioned singing.

Guy attacks the Texas blues icon "T-Bone Shuffle" with relaxed confidence, substituting hard-charging, angular phrasing and a stinging Fender sound for T-Bone's more liquid, jazz-influenced style. Undaunted by his fabled predecessor, Buddy stamps his own imprimatur on this masterwork. The vocals and instrumental work spiral up to a fever pitch before leveling off for the ride out.

On "A Poor Man's Plea," Junior testifies over

a hypnotic boogie riff, his voice at once a low menacing grumble and a frenzied exhortation. The harmonica breaks give off the thick, smoky aura of a South Side club on Saturday night.

Another fixture in Wells' repertoire, "Messin' With The Kid" showcases a funkier, sax-accented groove. The typical cock-of-the-walk lyrics turn on the song's irresistible eight-note riff and Buddy's icy retorts.

Willie Mabon's "I Don't Know," a masterpiece of blues vocal theater re-popularized with earnest intent but less than telling effect by The Blues Brothers, starts with a beautifully composed harp intro on top of the supple, pulsing beat. After every verse, Junior steps to the mike with a sarcastic "What should I say to make you mad *this* time baby..."\*\* that resolves over a soft, sustaining note from Buddy before the band jumps on the chorus. Easygoing and masterful, this gem is spiked with lightning guitar strikes from Guy which complement Wells' resonant harp and vocal interjections.

Transcending its patchwork history, *Buddy Guy & Junior Wells Play The Blues* displays remarkable consistency of purpose throughout. It survives as a natural document of two extraordinary artists whose talents were allowed to shine through without the hyped-up studio gimmickry and heavy-handed backup playing that marred so many other "fathers and sons" blues reunions.

—Jean-Charles Costa

\* by Buddy Guy, Olwen, BMI

\*\* by Willie Mabon, Roosevelt, BMI



Photography: Jim Marshall

1. **A MAN OF MANY WORDS**

(Buddy Guy)

Junior Wells - vocals & harmonica; Buddy Guy - vocals, lead guitar & rhythm guitar; Eric Clapton - rhythm guitar & bottleneck guitar; A. C. Reed - tenor sax; Dr. John - piano; Carl Radle - bass; Jim Gordon - drums

2. **MY BABY SHE LEFT ME  
(SHE LEFT ME A MULE TO RIDE)**

(Sonny Boy Williamson)

Junior Wells - vocals & harmonica; Buddy Guy - vocals, lead guitar & rhythm guitar; Eric Clapton - rhythm guitar & bottleneck guitar; A. C. Reed - tenor sax; Mike Utley - piano; Leroy Stewart - bass; Roosevelt Shaw - drums

3. a. **COME ON IN THIS HOUSE**

(Junior Wells)

b. **HAVE MERCY BABY**

(Junior Wells)

Same Personnel as track two

4. **T-BONE SHUFFLE**

(Aaron T-Bone Walker)

Junior Wells - vocals & harmonica; Buddy Guy - vocals, lead guitar & rhythm guitar; Eric Clapton - rhythm guitar & bottleneck guitar; A. C. Reed - tenor sax; Dr. John - piano; Leroy Stewart - bass; Roosevelt Shaw - drums

5. **A POOR MAN'S PLEA**

(Junior Wells)

Same personnel as track two

6. **MESSIN' WITH THE KID**

(Mel London)

Same personnel as track four

7. **THIS OLD FOOL**

(Buddy Guy)

Buddy Guy - vocals, lead guitar & rhythm guitar; J. Geils - rhythm guitar; Magic Dick - harmonica; Seth Justman - piano; Danny Klein - bass; Stephen Bladd - drums; Juke Joint Jimmy - foot tapping

8. **I DON'T KNOW**

(Willie Mabon)

Same personnel as track two

9. **BAD BAD WHISKEY**

(Thomas Davis)

Same personnel as track two

10. **HONEYDRIPPER**

(Joe Liggins)

Same personnel as track seven

All tracks except "This Old Fool" and "Honeydripper" recorded at Criteria Studios, Miami, Florida in 10/70  
Recording engineer: Ron Albert  
PRODUCED BY ERIC CLAPTON, AHMET ERTEGUN & TOM DOWD

"This Old Fool" and "Honeydripper" recorded at Intermedia Studios, Boston, Massachusetts in 4/72  
Recording engineer: Richard Oulleppe  
Special Thanks to Peter Wolf  
PRODUCED BY MICHAEL CUSCUNA

Overdubs on "A Man Of Many Words" and "This Old Fool" recorded at Atlantic Recording Studios, New York, NY in 4/72.  
Overdubs engineer: Gene Paul & Bobby Warner

Album remixed at The Kit Factory, New York, NY in 5/72  
Remix engineer: Harry Maslin  
Overdub & remix supervision: Michael Cuscuna

Cover Design: Haig Adishian

Digitally remastered from the original master tapes by Joe Gastwirt, Ocean View Digital in February 1992.  
Reissue producer: Yves Beauvais  
Special Thanks: James Austin, Bruce Buchanan, Billy Dahl, Tom Dowd, Michael Cuscuna

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